

The Formation Of A Dutch Joint Military Selection Centre.

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In the Netherlands there are four separate military selection centres in different locations for the Navy, the Army, the Air Forces and the Military Police. On financial and political grounds it has been decided to combine these four centres into one joint military selection centre in one location. The four different ways of psychological testing and interviewing must be therefore rearranged so that 80% of the 30.000 annual applicants will get the same procedure.

In this lecture, attention shall be given to the present way of testing and interviewing of the Dutch Forces, and to the proposed method of joint selection. I will also speak about the possibilities and difficulties that arise when four adequately functioning systems have to be merged into one system

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The Dutch government has decided that the Department of Defense has to cut costs over the next few years by more than 1.5 billion dollars. The Commanders in Chief of the Navy, the Army, the Air Force and the Military Police decided to economize mostly on the supportive parts and not so much on the operational parts of the Forces. The reductions in support are to be obtained by making one joint supportive centre for several branches instead of four different centres, one for each Force. So there will be joint centres for Recruitment and Selection, for Medical Support, for Transportation, for Clergy, for Infrastructure, for Computerization, for Higher Learning, for Salary Administration, etc. This paper deals with the joint centre for Recruitment and Selection, and mainly with psychological selection.

In the Netherlands each year 9,000 military jobs have to be filled with volunteers. This requires about 30.000 applicants. Until now, psychological selection was done by the four Forces in different locations, each in their own way. So the four systems had to be rearranged into one system.

The first approach to solve this problem was not a success. Representatives of the four psychological selection centres formed a study group which was to report within six weeks how best to develop a joint psychological selection centre. This effort failed because six weeks was insufficient time, because no decision rules were adopted to resolve disagreement between the members, and in part because the group's chairman was not committed enough.

So a new group was formed under the leadership of the future head of psychological selection. More time was allowed (five months), and decision rules were formed to resolve disagreements. These rules stated, among other things, that the joint selection centre is responsible for the facilities, the procedures, and the protocols for testing, personality questionnaires, and interviewing, and also that the Forces would dictate the cut off scores.

The result is that a plan for a new joint psychological selection centre was produced, which was approved by the Forces and is now introduced in the selection centres. In accordance with the plan, methods for psychological selection will be standardized next year across the four different locations, while a year later all the selection centres will be moved to one place in the centre of the Netherlands; this is possible because the Netherlands is a relatively small country.

A number of particular points of interest emerged in forming a joint selection centre. First, each selection centre and Force has its own way of working, which, although good for their own purposes, limits the other Forces in achieving their goals. In addition, all except one of the Forces make use of capacity / intelligence tests and all make use of personality questionnaires. However, the Forces differ greatly in their use of the results. For example, after completing the tests and the questionnaires, applicants are sent away if they don't get sufficient scores. But one Force use only capacity tests for this selection and sends away 50% of the applicants, while another Force uses only questionnaires for this purpose and rejects 25%, another make use both of capacity tests and of questionnaires, rejecting some 7% due to scores on capacity tests and another 7% based on questionnaires, and another rejects none on the basis of these tests or questionnaires. The interesting point is that all of them claim that their way of working is scientifically proved and that another way of working is not acceptable on the same scientific grounds or on ethical grounds. For some it is not acceptable to send away applicants based on the results of capacity tests while for others it is. The same beliefs exist with regard to personality questionnaires.

In the new joint selection centre there is a common testing battery consisting both of capacity/intelligence tests

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and personality questionnaires, which each candidate has to make. The Forces dictate the cut of scores. The expectation is that by working and selecting together the different styles or beliefs will diminish in the future.

A second point of interest is the interview. In the Netherlands, a semi-structured biographical interview is part of the selection process in each of the four centres. During the interview attention is given to different aspects of personality, background, motivation, etc., according to criteria based on historical grounds. The Navy always requires people who can be sent out for long periods all over the world on ships or as marines, which are part of the Navy in the Netherlands. The Army until recently selected mostly conscripts to function as platoon commanders, part of whose job was to take charge of other, not always very motivated, conscripts. Following the abolishment of compulsory service, the Army selects mostly voluntaries for soldiers functions. The area of operations also changed for the Army -- in the past they were more focused on Germany and East Europe, while nowadays they are prepared for peace-keeping and peace-enforcing operations all over the world. The method of selection in the Army has changed to meet this new conditions. With the start of a joint selection centre, Army requirements will be more like those of the Navy. The Air Force is mainly interested in the suitability of each person for a specific job, and therefore emphasize technical requirements over personality issues. Finally, the Military Police have depended in the past on the Army for selecting their members, and their way of selection still closely resembles that of the Army.

Thus, the Army and the Military Police give attention in the interview to 7 aspects, the Navy to 10 and the Air Force to 13 aspects. In the joint selection procedure, candidates will have to be scaled according to the following 10 dimensions, which are different from the way any of the Forces have done until now:

- social functioning
- discipline
- psychic stability
- will to achieve
- sportsmanship
- suitability for missions all over the world
- leadership capability
- motivation for the specific Force and its function(s)
- knowledge of Force-specific functions.


For each dimension, a four- or five-point scale has been developed with well-defined categories, and interviewers have to scale each candidates on each dimension. Depending upon cutoff scores given by the Forces, a candidate will be classified as psychologically suited for a function or not.

A final point of interest, which is still a problem, involves the development of a common strategy concerning how to deal with candidates who used drugs in the past. Until now, one of the Forces did not ask candidates if they have ever used drugs in the past, while asking this question was customary for the other three Forces. The reason that this Force doesn't ask about past drug use is that there are in practice no more drug users in this Force than in the other Forces, so, according to them, preliminary selection of potential drug users has no effect on the numbers of later drug users in the Force. Although this may be right, with the development of a joint psychological selection this Force has to join the others. If not, then all candidates who did use drugs in the past and who for that reason are not accepted by the other three Forces, will try to join this Force, with the consequence of a larger number of drug users and a bad reputation for this Force. In this way the formation of a joint selection centre leads to a more common strategy concerning how to deal with drug users.

Screening drugs-users presents yet another problem. In the new joint selection centre, all candidates will be asked in the interview about their use of drugs in the past. Well-defined criteria have been developed concerning how much past use of what particular kinds of drugs will be accepted. However, if a candidate is honest and speaks openly about past drug use, the result of the psychological examination can be that the candidate is not accepted because his use of drugs in the past. If a candidate doesn't talk about his past use of drugs, he is acceptable on this point according to the psychological selection criteria. This is neither fair to honest candidates nor is it good for the Forces. Therefore the medical selection is asked for help, but doctors in the Netherlands are not allowed to take urine or blood tests of candidates or test them for drugs or AIDS, for ethical reasons. As a result, only a portion of drug users will be eliminated during the selection process.

In this short lecture I hope that I have given you some impression of what can happen when four well-functioning psychological selection centres have to be rearranged into one centre. When done in the right

way, each can learn and profit from the process.

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